

This Serious Moonlight by glorious_spoon

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Summary:

The first time he kisses Steve, they're at a party, and they're both more than a little buzzed.

Or: Jonathan Byers finally gets around to figuring a few things out.

This Serious Moonlight

The first time he kisses Steve, they're at a party, and they're both more than a little buzzed. Jonathan is hanging out in a back hallway, avoiding drunk classmates and terrible music until Nancy's ready to leave, when Steve tracks him down. For some reason he's decided that they're friends now, and apparently when you're Steve Harrington, that means cornering people who are hiding from the party and trying to cajole them into trying horrible concoctions of cheap vodka and Tang.

"Come on, man, seriously, just one taste and I'll leave you alone," he's saying, and Jonathan rolls his eyes but accepts the cup. He's not nearly as annoyed as he's pretending to be. It's... unexpectedly nice, having Steve entirely focused on him. He doesn't necessarily *want* to be drawn in so easily by Steve's effortless charisma, but he's long since given it up as a lost cause.

The drink is exactly as gross as he expected, and Steve laughs when he pulls a face. "No good?"

"Are you sure there's not rat poison in this?" Jonathan asks, scraping his tongue against his teeth in a vain attempt to get rid of the taste.

"More for me," Steve says, and takes a swig. He coughs, eyes watering, and sets the cup down to wipe a hand over his mouth. "Oh, shit, that's *terrible*."

Jonathan bursts out laughing at his expression, and Steve is laughing too, and the thing is—

—the thing is, Steve's hair is artfully tousled in a way that looks accidental but probably took twenty minutes and half a can of hairspray to achieve, and he's warm and standing closer than he really needs to, and Jonathan can smell his cologne under the sticky sweetness of the drink, and his cheeks are flushed, and he's smiling, utterly fucking beautiful.

The thought feels like getting hit with something heavy, something that short-circuits his impulse control for a crucial moment, and he

reaches out without even really thinking about what he's doing. His hand lands on the back of Steve's neck, drawing him closer, and Steve takes a startled little breath as Jonathan pulls him down and kisses him on the mouth.

It's warm and soft and more than a little uncoordinated. Steve tastes like vodka and artificial oranges, and it seems like—for just an instant, it seems like he's kissing Jonathan back.

It lasts for all of three seconds before Jonathan's brain catches up enough to ask him what the *hell* he thinks he's doing. He tears himself away, takes a step back. Steve is staring at him with wide, shocked hazel eyes.

Jonathan feels cold and suddenly, horribly sober.

Steve is opening his mouth to speak, and Jonathan has never been as sure of anything as he is of the fact that he does not want to hear whatever the hell Steve is about to say to him. He shoves himself backward, spins on his heel, and flees.

The crowd is packed thick in the living room, someone's boombox blaring out 'My Sharona', too loud, fuzzy and slightly distorted. Jonathan shoves through the press of bodies, using his elbows when he needs to, and he feels like he doesn't start breathing again until he stumbles out the front door, through the haze of nicotine from the smokers on the porch, and into the clear, chilly quiet of a January night. His car is parked at the end of the drive, and for a wonder nobody has boxed him in. He leans against the icy sheet metal, letting it leach the heat from his body. Tries to get his breathing under control, to think.

A hand touches his elbow and he flinches hard, but it's only Nancy.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"I," Jonathan says. "I think I'm ready to go. If that's okay with you."

To her credit, she doesn't argue. "Okay. I need my jacket, though. Where's yours?"

In the back hallway where Steve is (was? Is he going to try to follow?

God, please no). Jonathan would rather face another Demogorgon than go back there. "I don't know. Don't worry about it."

Nancy is anything but stupid, and Jonathan can all but see the gears turning in her head as she peers up at him. "Jonathan, is everything okay?"

"Fine," Jonathan says tightly, turning his face away.

"Yeah, right."

"Nancy, it's fine. I'm fine. Can we please just go?"

Her jaw firms. "I'm going to get my jacket. I'll be right back."

When she returns, she's wearing her jacket and carrying his. She shoves it into his arms. "Put this on, you're going to freeze."

"You sound like my mother," Jonathan says, pulling it on. It's a weak attempt of humor that falls so flat that he can almost hear it shatter on the cold pavement, but at least he's not freezing now.

"Steve was back there," Nancy says, and holds out her hand. "Keys."

"What?"

"Give me the keys. You're drunk."

"You don't have a license," Jonathan argues, but he digs in his jeans pocket for his keys, all the same. He already knows that Nancy is going to win this argument, and the sooner they can get it over with, the sooner they can get *out* of here. Although if Steve hasn't followed them out yet, he's probably not going to. He tells himself that's a good thing.

"I have my permit," Nancy says, plucking the keys out of his hand and opening the driver's side door. Jonathan crosses to the other side of the car while she's fiddling with the seat lever.

"What do you mean, Steve was back there?" he asks, pulling the door shut behind him.

Nancy turns the key in the ignition, and the engine rumbles to life. "He was upset. He asked where you were. Did you guys get into a fight, or something?"

"No," Jonathan says shortly.

He can feel her eyes on him, but he stares straight ahead until she sighs and throws the shifter into reverse.

The roads are empty this time of night, and Jonathan sneaks glances at Nancy's face, lit up in unearthly shades of green by the dashboard lights. There's a tense set to her jaw that's probably only partly because she's focusing on the road.

"I didn't know you and Steve were still talking," he says, after five minutes or so of silence.

"We're trying to, anyway. Sometimes it works." Nancy cuts him a glance. "Please don't tell me you're jealous."

"No, I...no. I'm not jealous."

"Good." She turns back to the road. The headlights are turning the trees into tall, glowing phantoms as they pass and Jonathan watches them for a few minutes, then leans back against the headrest and closes his eyes.

"I kissed him," he says after a few more minutes.

The car swerves briefly across the yellow line as Nancy jerks the steering wheel, but she gets it straightened out before he has to try to grab for it. "You *what*?"

"I kissed Steve. At the party. That's probably why he's upset."

"Oh my god," Nancy says, and puts the blinker on, swerves off the road onto the shoulder, crunching gravel, and stomps the brakes hard enough to jolt them both forward in their seats. "You're serious."

"Yeah." Jonathan looks away from her.

For what feels like eternity, there's just silence. Just the sound of

both their breathing, the engine ticking as it cools, the wind whistling eerily in the bare trees outside. Then Nancy's small, warm hand lands on his shoulder.

"Why?" she asks.

"Because—" Because Steve is warm and funny and even sweet, when he wants to be, because of the cut of his jaw and his hazel eyes and his ridiculous hair, because— "Because I wanted to."

"Oh."

Jonathan risks looking at her. She's not—she doesn't look angry, exactly, but— "I'm sorry."

"For kissing Steve."

"Yeah."

"Do you still want to kiss him?" she asks. She still doesn't sound angry. He can't read what's in her voice. "Jonathan."

"I'm not..." he begins, then stops. *I'm not queer*, but obviously he is, at least a little bit, since he can still taste the memory of Steve's mouth, and it's not a bad memory at all. Even cut through as it is with panic. "I like girls. I love you."

"I'm not dumping you," Nancy says, correctly intuiting at least half of his problem. "I just want to know."

"Does it matter? He's going to punch me the next time he sees me."

"I don't actually think he will," she says. Jonathan snorts. "I mean it. He was worried about you."

He winces. "Right, because that's better."

"No, I mean... he wanted to know where you were."

"And you told him...?"

"I told him you were outside freaking out about something, and I'd

talk to you.”

“Thanks,” Jonathan says dryly, but he actually feels a little better. Nancy laughs, quiet.

“I’m sorry for dragging you to the party.”

“I don’t mind. Seriously.” Jonathan lifts a hand and brushes his knuckles against her cheek. When she leans into the touch, it warms something deep down inside of him, just like always. Maybe he hasn’t fucked this all up, after all. “I’m an idiot.”

“I know,” she says gently, and brings his hand to her lips, kisses his knuckles. “Steve is, too, you know. I’m the only smart one.”

Something about the way she says it gives him pause. “Nancy.”

“What?”

“You and Steve...” He stops. He doesn’t have any idea where he’s going with this. Or, well, he does, but he’s the one who went and kissed Steve, so it’s not like he has any high ground right now.

Nancy sighs. Her fingers tighten in his. “Yeah. Me and Steve.”

The thing is, guys like Jonathan never get the girl. Not when the girl is Nancy Wheeler, anyway; not when she’s smart and beautiful and kind and brave and way too good for the entire town of Hawkins, let alone one Jonathan Lee Byers, weirdo. Kissing her in the bunker back in November was the stupidest, *bravest* thing he’s ever done, but ever since then, he’s always kind of felt like he was living on borrowed time. He can’t be this lucky. He’s never been this lucky.

The other thing is, Nancy still loves Steve. Murray Bauman was right about a lot of things, but he was wrong about that. Steve doesn’t have any idea. Until right now, Jonathan wasn’t even completely sure that Nancy did.

What a fucking mess.

“What I don’t understand,” Nancy says, then stops, lets go of his hand, and says, all in a rush, “I don’t understand why I have to pick

one or the other. That's a bullshit rule."

"What?"

"And I don't understand why you have to pick, and why us being together means Steve has to be alone, and why we can't all just—"

"Just, what, go on three-way movie dates?" Jonathan asks. He injects every ounce of doubt he can into his voice, but he's imagining it now. The three of them holding hands in a dark theater. Steve's running commentary on the plot, and Nancy *shushing* him the whole time but laughing about it— about getting to kiss both of them in the car afterward, about all three of them sneaking upstairs to Nancy's four-poster bed. And it's stupid, because he can't *have* that. People don't. "Come on."

"Are you saying you wouldn't want to? If we could?"

"No, I—"

"Because I've seen you looking at him, you know," Nancy says. "So don't act like tonight was just out of the blue. I'm not stupid."

The thing is, it *was* out of the blue, for him. Now that he's thinking about, he can tell that he's always known the shape of Steve's hands, the stretch of too-small gym t-shirts across his shoulders, the curve of his smile. Or, if not always, then definitely for a while.

Nancy might not be stupid, but apparently, Jonathan is.

"I didn't know," he says, and chews his lip, and looks up at her. She's staring at him. "Nancy, I didn't know."

"Oh," she says, after a long moment, and fumbles for his hand again, squeezing it tightly. "Oh, Jonathan."

He laces his fingers together with hers, and leans across the center console to kiss her. It's more of a relief than he'll ever admit when she kisses him back, tangling her free hand in his hair and kissing him sweet and slow in a way that's only just starting to feel familiar.

She pulls away and brushes his bangs back to press her lips to his

forehead, briefly, like a benediction. “We’ll talk about this more later. When you’re not drunk.”

Jonathan sighs, slumping back into his seat as she turns the car back on and pulls back onto the road. His head is spinning slightly. “It’s never going to work out like you’re thinking, you know. Things don’t.”

“We’ll see,” Nancy says, and they don’t talk the rest of the way back.

It’s not going to matter, anyway. It was a party. They were both drunk. Jonathan hasn’t been to that many parties in his life, but he’s not a complete idiot, and he knows how plausible deniability works. He’ll see Steve by his locker on Monday, and with any luck Steve won’t try to punch him in the face (again) and they can both chalk it up to a dumb, fleeting, vodka-induced impulse and pretend it never happened, and it’ll be *fine*.

So of course when they pull into Jonathan’s driveway, Steve’s BMW is already parked next to the porch, headlights illuminating glittering frost in the frozen grass.

He’s pacing in their thin light, in his Members Only jacket and no gloves, talking to himself. It looks like a very involved conversation, possibly even an argument, but as soon as he sees Jonathan’s car, he stops dead and shoves his hands in his pockets.

Nancy puts the car in park, cuts the engine, and then they just sit there for an agonizingly long moment. Jonathan stares at the busted latch on the glove compartment. His heart is pounding. He can tell that Nancy is eyeing him.

“You can’t stay in here forever,” she says, after the silence has stretched out for what feels like approximately five years.

Jonathan reaches for a smile. “I could try.”

“Well, *I’m* not,” Nancy says, and shoves open the door, letting in a gust of icy wind as she climbs out. The door slams shut behind her. Jonathan gulps a breath of air that feels like ice water in his lungs and peers out through the windshield. Steve and Nancy are talking.

Her hands are moving, quick sharp motions like they always do when she's wound up, like she's trying to punctuate her words in the air; Steve's are still shoved in his pockets. His shoulders are hunched in a way that might just be the cold, but Nancy was right; he does look worried. Worse. *Anxious*. He cuts a glance at Jonathan, and Jonathan quickly drops his gaze before their eyes can meet.

This is stupid. They're not even friends, no matter what kind of overtures Steve has been in that directions. It's not like his world is going to end if Steve Harrington decides he doesn't want to be around him anymore.

A rap on the window. He flinches, just a little, and turns to see Steve leaning down to peer in at him through the far window. Nancy is standing a bit behind him, arms folded across her chest.

Steve knocks again. Clearly, he isn't planning on fucking off and letting Jonathan freak out in private, or at least with Nancy's reasonably sympathetic company, so Jonathan swears under his breath, undoes his seatbelt, and shoves the door open. The cold hits him like a slap when he climbs out onto the gravel driveway. If the world were a fair place, his mom would come out right now to yell at him for being out so late, but she's working a double, and Will is at Mike's house, and there's basically nobody to rescue him here other than Nancy. Who doesn't seem inclined to do any such thing at the moment.

"What?" he asks.

"Um," Steve says from the other side of the car. His hands are still in his pockets. "I kinda feel like it should be me asking that question. You know, considering."

"I'm sorry," Jonathan mutters.

Steve shrugs. "Why'd you do it?"

It would be easier, Jonathan thinks, if he'd just throw a punch already. That, he knows how to deal with. He's not afraid of Steve, not that way. He's got pretty comprehensive evidence that Steve can't fight his way out of a wet paper bag even when he isn't half-drunk.

This, he has no fucking clue how to handle.

"I don't know," he says.

Steve grins at that, sharp and sudden. "Bullshit."

"What?"

"I said," Steve repeats deliberately, and he's rounding the car now, pacing toward Jonathan, sneakers crunching on gravel, "bullshit. Nancy told me what she thinks, but I want to hear it from you."

Jonathan glares over at Nancy, and she glares right back.

Nancy, he thinks, has never had much interest in managing things for the benefit of other people's comfort. He shouldn't have expected anything different. It was *stupid* to expect anything different, but stupid has apparently been a theme for the evening.

And Steve is standing there, just standing there, and he looks as untouchable as he always used to. Before Jonathan broke his face with his fist, before he took a baseball bat to the Upside-Down monster, before Steve Harrington was anything other than yet another shitty thing about Hawkins High School to be survived.

"Look," he says, humiliation curling in the pit of his stomach, "I said I was sorry. I don't know what else you want. I'm going to bed."

"Jonathan," Nancy says, and she sounds *alarmed*, actually, like Jonathan is going off-script, reading his notes wrong, *what the hell else is new*—

"God damn it," Steve mutters, and steps forward, cups Jonathan's face in both his hands, and kisses him.

A real kiss this time, open-mouthed and wet. His mouth is hot, and his hands are like brands on Jonathan's cheeks, and he kisses like someone who's had a lot of practice at it. He's enough taller that Jonathan has to tilt his chin up, warm and solid and strong. It's nothing at all like kissing Nancy, and yet it makes heat bloom in his belly in exactly the same way, the same giddy arousal sparking like champagne beneath his skin. Steve is pressed up against him in a way

that makes it absolutely clear that he's just as into this as Jonathan is, and it's weird and confusing and *incredibly hot*.

He's breathing hard when they break apart, and so is Steve, who is looking at him with wide eyes.

"Okay?" he asks, and there's something anxious in his voice, like he's still worried that it really might not have been.

Nancy's right: he is an idiot. They both are. Jonathan lets out a breath of laughter, all the tension seeping out of him. "Yeah. It's okay."

"Oh, thank God," Steve says, all in a rush.

Jonathan snorts, slaps a hand over his mouth, but it's too late: helpless laughter is already bubbling out of him, three parts giddy and one part relieved. After a second, Steve starts laughing too, and Nancy is right there, warm at his elbow. She kisses Jonathan, and then she stands up on her tiptoes to kiss Steve, too, just as easy as that.

Steve's hands flail for just a second, and then he wraps them around her waist, folding into her, kissing her with the same single-minded intensity that was just focused on Jonathan. It's nothing he hasn't seen before, after a year of pining after Nancy (after both of them, he can admit that now), but this time the feeling that lodges sharp and hot beneath his ribcage definitely isn't envy. He can feel his face burning, even in the cold.

Steve and Nancy break apart, and smile into each other's eyes for several seconds before turning identical, apprehensive expressions on him.

"Jonathan?" Nancy asks.

He opens his mouth, then shuts it without speaking.

"Aw, shit," Steve mutters. He lets go of Nancy, and starts to step back. Jonathan reaches out before he can, catches him by the wrist and holds him still. Warm skin, pulse jumping beneath his cold fingers. Steve freezes. "Byers? Jonathan? Are you— is this alright?"

Jonathan licks his lips.

“Yeah,” he manages finally. “It’s alright.” His voice comes out weird and strangled, and Steve blinks at him for a moment before he seems to get it. A smile spreads across his face, slow and almost insufferably smug.

“Oh. You *like* that.”

He sounds so honestly delighted that Jonathan can’t even be pissed at him, even when Nancy whacks him on the shoulder. And really, this is ridiculous. It’s like fifteen fucking degrees outside, and they’re doing this in the driveway when the house is empty and *right there*.

“We should.” He clears his throat. “Uh. Go inside. I mean, you guys have to be cold.”

It’s a weak excuse, and he can see that in the way Nancy rolls her eyes and grins at him, but she also rubs her hands together ostentatiously. “It is really cold out. We could go in. If you guys want.”

“That,” Steve says, “is an *awesome* idea. Lead the way.”